

[By Tim Johnson, Burlington Free Press](#)

New federal legislation that would impose limits on election spending by special interests won a ringing endorsement Monday by U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., and three private-sector representatives.

The legislation was introduced in the U.S. House and Senate in an effort to counteract a U.S. Supreme Court decision in January that lifted longtime restrictions on corporate and union campaign contributions.

Welch, a co-sponsor, decried the decision in *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission* that he said "opened the spigot of money" from big corporate interests aimed at influencing elections. He said the ruling undid 100 years of history; since the Teddy Roosevelt era, corporations had been prohibited from direct electioneering activity. The decision permits interest groups, which until recently had funneled much of their contributions to political action committees, to spend freely on elections.

The proposed legislation, Welch said, would ban campaign spending by government contractors and beneficiaries of the TARP bank bailout; prevent foreign corporations from influencing elections; strengthen disclosure requirements for political advertising; and prevent corporations and unions from coordinating their political activities with candidates.

With the disclosure provision, Welch said, special interests no longer would be able to hide behind political advertisements by front organizations. Corporate CEOs would be required to identify themselves as ad sponsors, just as political candidates do for their own commercials.

Welch said the legislation was designed to withstand a court challenge. More broadly, he said, he favors public financing for elections, but added that any effort to promote that this year "faces an uphill climb."

Joining Welch for a news conference Monday morning at the South Burlington City Office building were Vee Gordon, a board member of the League of Women Voters of Vermont; Paul Burns, executive director of VPIRG; and Paul Comey, a vice president of Green Mountain Coffee Roasters.

Gordon called heavy election spending by special interest an "anathema" and said the League hopes the legislation can be enacted in time for the fall elections. Burns called the court decision "a colossal mistake" because it equates the free-speech rights of corporations and individuals, and he applauded the legislative effort "to mitigate" the effects. Comey said the legislation would help provide transparency not ensured by the court decision.

"At least everybody will understand who's backing candidates," he said of the disclosure requirement.

"It's all about transparency," Comey said.